

# "Tilling Roots&Seeds", the role of Art in the future of Agriculture

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## Abstract

"Tilling Roots&Seeds, the role of Art in the future of Agriculture" is a presentation of the Creative Europe's co founded project that explores the better scenarios of the agriculture and global food supply chain through inviting artists and farmers to work and dream together.

## Keywords

biodiversity, art and agriculture, techno-agrarian society, regenerative agriculture, retro-innovation

## Introduction

"Tilling Roots and Seeds" is an international cooperation project between Ars Electronica (AT), KILOWATT (IT), University of Barcelona (ES) and Quo Artis (ES) as lead partner and co-funded by the Creative Europe Programme of the European Union. "Tilling Roots and Seeds" aims to enhance cultural cooperation and capacity for artistic research and practice on the topic of the plant biodiversity crisis and sustainable food system.

The project also supports the role of art as a tool to awaken a critical understanding of climate change that sheds light on how humans generate and affect it through the current food consumption systems. The project assumes that innovative solutions require the engagement of those involved in farming and food production as well as the voice of communities, as innovation can derive also from traditional knowledge.

## Tilling Roots&Seeds

*And so the use of chemicals is not a problem for the entomologist alone. Philosophers, men of religion, artists and poets must also help to decide whether or not it is permissible to use chemicals in farming, and what the results of using even organic fertilizers might be.*

Masanobu Fukuoka, *The One-Straw Revolution: An Introduction to Natural Agriculture*, 1975 (1st edition in Japanese).

Fukuoka, the ideologue and practitioner of modern natural farming, was writing these words in the midst of the "First Green Revolution", as agricultural practices were being transformed on a global scale, prioritising increased production. Between the 1960s and the late 1980s, this revolution transformed agricultural practices through the development of high-yielding cereal varieties, expansion of irrigation infrastructure, mechanisation and technification of management, as well as the adoption of hybrid seeds, fertilisers and pesticides.

These changes supplanted traditional farming techniques, affecting an age-old way of life based on self-sufficiency and the cultivation of local varieties. Subsequently, in the 1980s, the "Second Green Revolution" began, notable for its emphasis on agricultural technification through the development of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and the extensive application of biotechnology.

Although it has increased agricultural productivity, it also raises ecological questions, given the intensive use of chemical inputs, dependence on oil and the consequent loss of biodiversity and soil impoverishment.

The duality of interests in capitalist agriculture is reflected in these developments, which offer commercial solutions to food challenges, but raise concerns about their overall impact on society and the planet. This duality is manifested in two currently emerging phenomena: on the one hand, the European Union is trying to adopt a Nature Restoration Act that aims to restore part of the agricultural

ecosystems, albeit in a modest and limited way. On the other hand, the European Commission is proposing changes to the rules on genetically modified plants and postponing a decision on the use of glyphosate. Just during the week of writing this paper, one of the largest mobilisations of European farmers is taking place, calling for the repeal of Agenda 2030 and demanding the elimination of environmental and biodiversity protection laws, "which threaten agriculture, livestock farming and rural areas". The European Commission had to give in and accept the protesters' conditions.

The rise of robotics and artificial intelligence is presented to society as a more environmentally friendly solution, but is this really the case?

At the turn of the millennium, the movement to reduce the use of agrochemicals is growing, as is the number of followers of the "Fukuoka method", especially among new generation farmers, but also among artists researching this area of human activity.

During "Tilling Roots & Seeds," running from November 1, 2023, through October 30, 2025, Quo Artis and the three other project partners will reflect on the current situation and envision more sustainable futures. This will be achieved through artistic open calls, the organization of multidisciplinary focus groups, publications, the production of works, participatory workshops, and exhibitions.

The aim of the initiative is to enhance cultural cooperation, research capacity and artistic practice on the theme of the plant biodiversity crisis and the sustainable food system in Europe. This involves finding collaborative ways to discover, regenerate and narrate the work of farmers in all aspects, working in interconnectedness and harmony with the natural world and respecting future generations.

The project also supports the role of art as a tool to awaken a critical understanding of climate change that sheds light on how humans generate and affect it through current food consumption systems. The project assumes that innovative solutions require the engagement of those involved in agriculture and food production, as well as the voice of communities, as innovation can also derive from traditional knowledge.

Building on the experience gained in the past Roots and Seeds XXI project (active from 2021 to 2023 and co-funded by Creative Europe), "Tilling Roots & Seeds" aims to enhance the creative sector's role in addressing today's biodiversity crisis and environmental challenges. It provides a platform for artists to work alongside scientists and the agricultural community, fostering collaborative efforts to envision and create sustainable futures. This initiative not

only broadens the scope for creative contributions to environmental conservation but also facilitates cross-sector partnerships that are vital for imagining and realising sustainable scenarios.

On January 22 we launched an Open Call that will support three artistic researches and will offer one grant for the production of an Artwork. We search for projects that will illuminate the critical connection between planetary health and the evolution of our food systems, particularly in the context of the climate and biodiversity crisis. We encourage applications that integrate scientific and statistical data to offer fresh perspectives.

We are looking for artists or collectives that delve into:

- new narratives or rituals regarding food production and consumption
- agroecology and other systemic approaches to agriculture
- transdisciplinary collaborations between disciplines aimed at better imaging the future of food;
- food production as a practice of care
- experiment practices of re-enchanting the world connected to the care of the land
- techno-agrarian society

We welcome applications from artists and collectives centered around the exploration of land stewardship and the crafting of innovative speculative narratives, critical tools and experimental practices that challenge the status quo of current unsustainable food production. We also encourage the exploration of new rituals linked to the notion of land care and the collective empowerment of local communities anywhere. During our residencies, that will take place in Tuscany and Emilia Romagna (IT) and in Catalonia (ES), we will offer the artists the chance to:

- experiment transdisciplinary collaboration between artists, researchers, local growers and consumers
- understand the relation between climate change and agriculture.
- build capacities on climate change and sustainable food production through art and creativity, relaying on the ability to reconnect humankind and Nature
- present new narratives and rituals through artistic practices and research, that help building future sustainable food scenarios.

All projects must be developed in direct collaboration with farmers and residency hosts in both rural and urban contexts. By the time ISEA 2024 is held, we will have selected the proposals and will be able to share them with the symposium audience. The final results of the artistic researches, as well as the artwork, will be shown in Barcelona by Quo Artis, in Boronia by Kilowatt and in the festival Ars Electronica 2025, Linz (AE).

The presentation will end with a Q&A during which the author will respond to questions and offer additional information about development of this project.



**Figure 1.** Futuristic Farm in Lerida, Spain  
Author: Tatiana Kourochkina with Midjourney

## References

### Books

[1] Masanobu Fukuoka, *La Revolución de una brizna de de paja*, (Buenos Aires: Econautas Editorial, 2021), 27.  
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### Websites

<https://tillingrootsandseeds.eu>

<https://quoartis.org/project/tilling-roots-and-seeds>

## Acknowledgements

We thank the project partners for their professionalism and commitment, as well as the research center Institut Botànic, Contorno Urbano and Ferrer Sustainability Foundations, as well as urban agriculture company Tectum Garden, all from Barcelona (ES).

Gratitude for the support by: the European Union - Creative Europe.

## Author's Biography

**Tatiana Kourochkina** is the co-founder and director of Quo Artis Art&Science, a non-profit organization based in

Barcelona, Spain. Quo Artis produces cross-disciplinary artworks, organizes exhibitions, expeditions and conferences.

Tatiana has a degree in History from the Russian State University for the Humanities (Moscow) and a master Degree in Architecture of the Landscape from IUAV (Venice).